

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A printer comprising:

a printing mechanism, the printing mechanism being arranged to utilize a consumable product during printing;

5 a sensor that generates a status signal indicative of a status of the printer;

a network interface suitable for coupling the printer to a network; and

a controller operable to send an e-mail message to a maintenance computer through the network in response to the status signal.

10 2. The printer of claim 1, wherein the sensor is operable to generate the status signal based on a remaining amount of the consumable product.

3. The printer of claim 2, wherein the sensor is operable to generate the status signal based on whether the remaining amount of the consumable product is less than a threshold value.

15 4. The printer of claim 3, wherein the consumable product is an ink ribbon, and the printing mechanism includes a thermal transfer mechanism.

5. The printer of claim 3, wherein the consumable product is printing ink, and the printing mechanism includes an ink jet mechanism.

6. The printer of claim 3, wherein the consumable product is toner, and the printing mechanism includes an electrophotographic mechanism.

20 7. The printer of claim 1, wherein the sensor is operable to generate the status signal based on an error status of the printer.

8. The printer of claim 1, wherein the controller is operable to cause the network interface to send the e-mail message in a Simple Mail Transfer Protocol format.

25 9. The printer of claim 8, wherein the controller is operable to insert consumable product data representing the remaining amount of the consumable product into a data portion of the e-mail message.

30 10. The printer of claim 8, wherein the controller is operable to insert printer error data representing the error status of the printer into a data portion of the e-mail message.

11. A printer comprising:

means for printing, the means for printing being arranged to utilize a consumable product during printing;

means for generating a status signal indicative of a status of the consumable product;

means for coupling the printer to a network; and

5 means for sending an e-mail message to a maintenance computer through the network in response to the status signal.

12. A method for providing status information of a printer, comprising:

generating a status signal indicative of a status of the printer;

generating an e-mail message indicative of the status of the printer based on the status signal; and

10 sending an e-mail message to a maintenance computer through a network.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the status signal is generated based on a remaining amount of a consumable product used for the printer.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the status signal is generated based on whether the remaining amount of the consumable product is equal to or less than a threshold value.
15

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the consumable product is an ink ribbon, and the printer includes a thermal transfer mechanism.

16. The method of claim 14, wherein the consumable product is printing ink, and the printer includes an ink jet mechanism.

17. The method of claim 14, wherein the consumable product is toner, and the printer includes an electrophotographic mechanism.
20

18. The method of claim 12, wherein the status signal is generated based on an error status of the printer.

19. The method of claim 12, wherein the controller is operable to cause the network interface to send the e-mail message in a Simple Mail Transfer Protocol format.
25

20. The method of claim 19, wherein consumable product data representing the status of the consumable product is inserted into a data portion of the e-mail message.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein printer error data representing the error status of the printer is inserted into a data portion of the e-mail message.
30